



## **PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN MAINTENANCE STAFF FOCUS GROUP REPORT January 2003**

Contained within this report are an Executive Summary, a detailed summary of the focus group discussion, and the results of the questionnaire.

### **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **A. Introduction**

The public employees who perform maintenance on the City's parks and open space have a deep understanding of the challenges facing parks and natural areas in Eugene. Consequently, their perspective is important when developing a parks, recreation and open space plan for the next 20 years. In an effort to gather input from these employees for Eugene's PROS Comprehensive Plan Update, a POS maintenance staff focus group workshop was held on January 22, 2003. Twenty-eight staff attended the workshop and 16 submitted written comments.

#### **B. Participants**

**Tom Moniot**, Landscape Park Specialist 3  
**Iris Edmiston**, Turf and Grounds Park Specialist 2  
**Tim Rhay**, Park Maintenance Manager  
**Richard Zucker**, Maintenance Crew Supervisor  
**Zane Renfro**, Park Specialist 3  
**Arlen Markus**, Natural Resources Park Specialist 3  
**Tom Uff**, Irrigation Specialist  
**Michael Robert**, Gardener  
**Dave Lane**, Facility Maintenance Supervisor  
**John Luther**, Tree Specialist  
**Bob Whitlatch**, Park Specialist 3  
**Sarah Medary**, Parks Maintenance Manager  
**Ken Auxier**, Park Specialist 3  
**Cesar Gutierrez**, Park Specialist 1

**Richard Cribbs**, Turf and Grounds Park Specialist 2  
**Bill Hunter**, Park Amenities  
**Dennis Rattenborg**, Turf Grounds Sports Fields  
**Josiah Sheehan**, Park Specialist 1  
**Rob Hallett**, Park Specialist 4  
**Todd Richards**, Park Specialist 2  
**Dave Edwards**, Park Specialist 2  
**Joanne Glore**, Park Specialist 2  
**Matt McRae**, Park Specialist 1  
**Larry Morris**, Maintenance Supervisor  
**John Clark**, Turf and Grounds Supervisor  
**William Dunham**, Turf and Grounds/Irrigation  
**Eric Johnson**, POS Supervisor  
**Andrea Riner**, POS Planning Manager  
**Sally McIntyre**, MIG, Inc., Consultants  
**Misty Fisher**, MIG, Inc., Consultants

#### **C. Overview**

Sarah Medary, City of Eugene Parks Maintenance Manager, opened the meeting and thanked participants for their time and input. Sally McIntyre, MIG, led the focus group discussion. Topics included the vision for the future of Eugene's parks and natural areas, service strengths, and suggested improvements to park maintenance and the park and open space system. Participants also received questionnaires to complete. This report summarizes points from the group discussion and the written questionnaires.



## D. Key Findings

The following key findings emerged from the workshop and written comments:

- The maintenance staff **vision for the future** of parks, recreation and open space includes:
  - Diverse, accessible park and recreation opportunities;
  - Clean, safe and well-maintained parks and facilities;
  - Efficient, professional staff;
  - Community ownership and participation in our parks and open spaces; and
  - Knowledge that the City planned effectively to meet future needs.
- **Core values** of park maintenance staff which will help achieve this vision include:
  - Pride, responsibility and ownership in the job;
  - Maintaining the City's investment in existing parks and facilities;
  - Environmental stewardship;
  - Innovative and knowledgeable staff; and
  - Positive teamwork among staff and between planning, design, maintenance and programming.
- Maintenance staff recognized the following as some of the **most important benefits** of parks, recreation services and open space:
  - Provide opportunities to enjoy nature/outdoors
  - Connect people together, building stronger families and neighborhoods; and
  - Improve health and wellness.
- Staff recognized the following as **service strengths**:
  - Employee strengths, such as commitment, teamwork, innovation and quality work;
  - Maintaining a safe, clean environment for all to enjoy;
  - Quality sports fields; and
  - Diverse types of parks, including wetlands and natural areas.
- Maintenance staff noted the need for the following **improvements**:
  - Upgrade existing older parks and facilities to reduce maintenance costs;
  - Stabilize funding and provide adequate staffing in all maintenance areas;
  - Provide new facility types to increase community use, such as community centers, a regional play area, sports complex, dog parks, etc.;
  - Improve park safety, such as by providing rangers or a maintenance swing-shift to improve park supervision;
  - Improve staff wages and provide a variety of responsibilities (cross-train staff).
  - Decrease "unnecessary" lawn areas;
  - Replace outdated irrigation systems and reduce irrigation of areas where it is not needed, such as native plant areas;
  - Increase public awareness of wetlands and natural areas, and continue invasive species removal;
  - Improve trails, provide adequate trail drainage and provide public education and information, such as improved trailhead signage;



- Continue upgrading play areas;
  - Improve trash pick-up and removal;
  - Keep staff safety in mind when designing medians and use low maintenance plantings; and
  - Provide more fun water complexes and improve maintenance.
- The majority of staff agreed that they are provided with the **necessary tools and equipment** to efficiently maintain park, open space and recreation facilities; more specialty tools and replacement of aging fleet vehicles were among suggested improvements.
  - Improving communication at all levels was mentioned as the best way to **enhance partnerships**.
  - **Community volunteers** could best assist with maintenance by creating a presence in the parks and assisting with clean-up, invasive species removal, and enforcement of park rules (such as ticketing those who don't clean up after dogs).
  - When asked to identify the **highest priority** park, recreation and open space improvements, most staff thought that **stable funding** and **renovating existing parks** to rebuild Eugene's park infrastructure were the most needed improvements.

## II. DISCUSSION

A detailed summary of workshop comments follows.

### A. Maintenance Staff Vision

When asked what positive things you would want to hear a customer say about Eugene's parks and open space opportunities 10 years from now, participants mentioned the following:

- A broad variety of parks, natural areas and facilities for recreation activities;
- Community ownership of neighborhood parks;
- Safe, clean, well kept parks and facilities;
- Community members are vocal in their appreciation for our parks;
- Beautiful trees and landscape;
- Parks are free and accessible;
- Land was purchased for parks prior to development;
- Staff is professional and efficient;
- Staff makes good decisions; and
- Staff is just as effective as they were in the past.

### B. Service Strengths

Participants were asked what kinds of things the City of Eugene does particularly well in providing parks, recreation, open space and maintenance services. Participants mentioned many employee strengths, such as commitment, teamwork, innovations and quality work, as well as the facilities and services provided to the community. Comments included:

#### *Staff Qualities*

- Maintain good interaction with the public;
- Genuine cooperation among all the crews;
- Diversity in staff skills;
- Accomplish a lot with little resources;
- Pride in our work;
- Good humored staff; Attractive uniforms; Proactive;
- Provide high quality workmanship;
- Staff commitment;
- Innovative; and
- Fixing things as needed, staff performs "invisible maintenance" both on and off duty.



### *Other Strengths*

- Access to quality training;
- Volunteer programs;
- Protecting the environment;
- Good equipment; and
- Good facilities (e.g., gardens, Amazon pool, bike paths and sports fields).

### **C. Service Improvements**

When asked what the City could do to make tangible improvements in park and open space maintenance and operations, the following was suggested:

#### *Existing Parks and Facilities*

- Upgrade aging and older facilities to help reduce maintenance costs;
- Improve Aubrey Park, Amazon Park ball fields and all wading pools;
- Provide more restrooms in parks;
- Improve signage at all trailheads;
- Provide new park signs;
- Improve accessibility at all parks and facilities;
- Develop wider maintenance paths to allow better maintenance vehicle access;
- Eliminate all portable picnic tables (too expensive and hard to maintain);
- Establish a tree maintenance program;
- Improve garden maintenance;
- Develop a plan to better utilize Cuthbert Amphitheatre;
- Address drainage problems at many parks, i.e., Fairmount Park;
- Reduce impacts of vehicles through the parks;
- Provide a more efficient internal light operating system; and
- Privatize mowing service to reduce equipment costs.

#### *New Parks and Facilities*

- Develop a large sports complex;
- Provide a regional/destination park for families;
- Draw families to parks by incorporating items such as a carousel or gazebos in the park;
- Identify the best suitable sites for community centers (i.e., in a large park that would provide better visibility and use);
- Enforce stronger zoning laws to protect our parks and open space; and
- Encourage connectivity between parks.

#### *Safety and Security*

- Provide a way to enforce basic park rules;
- Consider hiring a ranger to patrol parks and facilities; and
- Reorganize maintenance work hours to include a 2-person swing shift to create a presence in all the parks and facilities during open hours.



### *Funding*

- Improve funding for parks maintenance, e.g., through a serial levy or by forming a park district;
- Stabilize funding so we can hire more park maintenance staff; and
- Educate the public/taxpayers about the value of parks and open space and their role in park maintenance.

### *Partnerships*

- Improve all existing partnerships; and
- Improve communication with the school district.

### *Staffing*

- Improve/upgrade the existing wage system;
- Eliminate the current ineffective park specialist positions and provide cross-training to staff;
- Improve quality control of contractor's work; and
- Improve inventory procedures for park sites and equipment.

## **D. Priorities**

When asked to identify what park, recreation and open space improvements are most needed in Eugene today, most participants thought that stable funding and renovating existing parks to rebuild Eugene's park infrastructure were the most needed improvements. In the workshop discussion, the following items were mentioned:

- Better, sustainable funding (27);
- Rebuild park infrastructure (25);
- Adequate staffing (5);
- Develop park ranger program (5);
- Cross-train staff /increase diversity of tasks (5);
- Promote a park maintenance swing shift to cover all hours parks are open (4);
- Provide better wages and respect for maintenance staff (3);
- Reduce automobile impacts on our parks (2);
- Provide environmental education, e.g., educate the public about wetlands (2);
- Develop major sports complex to host large events;
- Construct a bike park (BMX);
- Develop an indoor skateboard park;
- Increase "destination parks";
- Promote the development of additional dog parks;
- Promote park connectivity;
- Construct a wooden roller coaster to draw families to the park;
- Construct more restrooms and upgrade existing restrooms;
- Rotate lighting responsibilities over to the Facility Management Department;
- Provide enhanced access to our rivers;
- Eliminate bureaucracy within the City;
- Address homeless transients;
- Provide better internal communication between the planning and design teams;
- Promote facilities by conducting improved marketing;
- Preserve our environment;
- Streamline/improve contractors work;
- Educate the staff and the community on park laws and rules; and
- Incorporate coffee cart/vendors into the park system.



### III. QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

A detailed summary of the questionnaire responses follows. The numbers in parentheses indicate how many people mentioned a particular statement.

**1) If you were to imagine a customer talking about Eugene ten years from now, what positive things would you want to hear them say about the City's parks and open space opportunities?**

- The City staff is doing a good job with limited resources, the parks are looking good, clean, well maintained, have less transients; parks are safer and a fun place to play (4)
- There is a good cross-section of activities available and a good mix of parks, open space and facilities that provide access to youth, families, and people of all ages (3)
- Parks are valuable to life and the access is free (3)
- There are eco-friendly designed parks which utilize native plants, especially in riparian areas (2)
- Parks are accessible and have neighborhood ownership
- The City employees are still working because the taxpayers believed in them
- The maintenance department maintains a healthy plant environment and is responsive to public demand
- The City has acquired a lot of property and planned effectively for future parkland

**2) What do you think the core values of the park, recreation and open space maintenance staff should be in order to generate those positive comments (e.g., what beliefs should drive our decisions and govern our actions as employees)? (Examples of core values might include affordability or teamwork.)**

- Staff should take pride, responsibility and ownership in the job; staff should help out where necessary outside of regular tasks (2)
- Focus on improving what we already have rather than adding additional sites (2)
- Maintain free access, cooperation, innovative ideas and knowledgeable staff (2)
- Maintain environmental stewardship and communication in all aspects of every City project (2)
- Positive team work between maintenance, management, designer and engineer (2)
- Good work ethics, pride and goals to work towards.
- Maintenance staff should value top notch equipment, training opportunities and good people
- Maintain dedicated drive to do good work, an ability to improve staff skills and continue excellent planning by park staff
- Vision and sound decision-making, always considering long-term maintenance
- Evaluating each park now in order to properly use the land (e.g., eliminate the construction of lawn on riparian areas)
- Maintain affordability for the public to recreate, foster youth employment opportunities and continue education programs to involve users
- Provide both active and passive recreational opportunities
- Provide a safe and clean environment
- Foster good humor, conduct hard work and maintain a good attitude

**3) Which of the following benefits of parks, recreation service and open space are most important to you?**

- Provide opportunities to enjoy nature/outdoors (13)
- Connect people together, building stronger families and neighborhoods (7)
- Improve health and wellness (5)
- Protect the natural environment (3)
- Promote youth development (2)
- Help seniors and disabled people remain active (2)



- Provide opportunities for lifelong learning
- Provide opportunities to celebrate and raise awareness of diverse cultural traditions
- Enhance community image and a sense of place
- Other: Parks and open space are safe and well maintained with excellent bike paths

**4) What kinds of things does the City of Eugene do particularly well in providing parks, recreation, open space and maintenance services? Use specific examples if possible.**

- Maintaining a safe, clean environment for all to enjoy (e.g., safe play areas, good visibility for safe walking, clean restrooms, vegetation management, bike path maintenance and safe trails) (6)
- Sport fields are maintained well and positive feedback is received from users (2)
- Provides diverse types of parks including wetland areas, ridgeline hiking trails and habitat for many animals (2)
- Good committed workers that are environmentally responsible stewards of the land (2)
- "Doing more with less attitude" (2)
- Inter-crew coordination
- Accomplishes large amounts of work with reducing resources
- Provides excellent bike path access
- Provides quality training, good equipment, team work, uniforms to reflect professionalism and striving for quality to serve the public
- Conducts a variety of successful programs (e.g., mowing program, Hilyard Center program, Campbell Center program, senior program and disabled citizens program)
- Provides both active and passive recreational opportunities
- Promotes access to training and procured property for park and open space
- Provides good parking
- Provides ample dog parks

**5) What could the City do to make tangible improvements in the following programs and services?**

*Turf and Sports Field Maintenance*

- Improve budget and hire additional staff (6)
- Remove turf where it cannot be utilized (e.g., along roadways) and discontinue end of day rash decisions to "just make it a lawn; "unnecessary lawn is a waste of money, water and fertilizer (3)
- Provide a large multi-use sports complex (2)
- The sport fields need to be upgraded and improved more often
- Increase the number of fields so the renovation of older ones can occur
- Construct more synthetic fields for year-round sports activities
- Raise fees for sport field use because they are in excellent shape
- Integrate better with pest management
- Work on drainage problems in parks
- Construct wider sidewalks at parks to avoid turf damage due to maintenance and police vehicles
- Increase funding to sports programs and facilities
- Hire more staff to help keep up with new facilities

*Landscape and Tree Maintenance*

- Recognize the value of the tree crew and the challenges they face when maintaining the trees in our City; continue financing this program and provide more support (6)
- Conduct a tree inventory (2)
- Make improvements to older parks a priority before developing new parks (2)
- Encourage planting with native species





- Ensure that contracted plantings and installations are done completely using quality nursery stock and thorough planting techniques
- Ensure that installations use quality soil products
- Consult and communicate with maintenance personnel for input before construction begins
- Provide a variety of work options (cross-train employees)
- Hire at least two additional full-time employees (existing staff is spread too thin)

#### *Irrigation Maintenance*

- Replace outdated systems, e.g., Alton Baker Park, Skinner Butte, M. Jacobs, Amazon Park, Laurelwood Park (4)
- Consider not irrigating in areas with native species (3)
- Hide visibility of sprinkler heads to help cut down on vandalism
- Hire more staff
- Enhance communication between staff
- Continue to strive for excellence

#### *Wetland and Natural Resource Maintenance*

- Increase access to these areas, promote awareness and educate the public to ensure the continued support for the program (3)
- Continue removing invasive exotic plant species such as ivy, scotch broom, and blackberry (2)
- Consider quality of wetland areas after seven year mitigation period
- Improve signage at trail heads
- Tie wetlands into existing park system
- Promote less intervention in wetland areas and eliminate building in these areas (Hyundai)
- Allow more people to career develop into the wetland and natural resources department, so it is not an elitist club
- Keep areas as natural as possible, mow occasionally, move out transients

#### *Trail Maintenance*

- Improve hiking, jogging trails and provide adequate drainage (3)
- Provide new signage, especially trail-head signs (3)
- Consider trail construction not just maintenance; conduct trail planning, not just recreation on social trails (e.g., complete a connected path through to the Ridge Line Trail) (2)
- Provide a GPS map of existing trails
- Continue funding and provide a larger staff to this department
- Move lighting of trails funding to the facilities division (they have the electricians)
- Listen to user needs
- Involve youth and school groups
- Support team building and educational opportunities





#### *Park Amenity Maintenance*

- Provide more restrooms, as well as update existing restrooms (3)
- Provide crew with more equipment, staff and staff training (swing shift worked well in the past) (2)
- Continue upgrading play areas (2)
- Pick up more visible trash and provide a small garbage truck (2)
- Develop new parks in light use areas and provide more new turf in existing parks
- Clean the bottoms of all trash containers at least monthly, especially during the summer months
- Continue vegetation removal which will keep illegal camping down
- Hire park “rangers”
- Re-evaluate and reprioritize the park amenity department
- Realize the importance of this job

#### *Median and Right of Way Landscape and Tree Maintenance*

- Always keep in mind staff safety when designing medians and right-of-ways; evaluate each median and modify areas that are not safe and planted successfully; also, permit crew input on all projects (6)
- Promote low maintenance plantings (2)
- Develop more new medians that incorporate trees
- Gain neighborhood support for areas where medians can be planted and maintained by local residents
- Continue support and funding
- Provide more appropriate equipment for street work
- Provide areas for service vehicles to park close enough to work

#### *Volunteer Maintenance*

- Provide additional staffing and support to expand the volunteer programs (2)
- Evaluate current procedures for volunteers
- Permit volunteers to assist in recreation maintenance needs (e.g., mowing)
- Improve visibility and advertisements for volunteer opportunities
- Use groups of volunteers only...no lone volunteers (e.g., Alton Baker)
- Provide more sheriff supervision for crew operations
- Hire a grant writer to help with funding
- Design a program that helps reduce overtime pay and uses the other employees in the City to get the job done on time
- Recruit neighborhood volunteers to ‘adopt’ parks

#### *Pool Maintenance*

- Provide more fun pools and pool complexes overall (3)
- Enhance maintenance of pools; keep them cleaner (2)
- Allow on-site staff to perform a portion of the grounds maintenance
- Enhance scheduling hours for open swim
- Provide trainee positions
- Upgrade existing pools (e.g., Sheldon and Echo Hollow)

#### *Recreation Facility Maintenance*

- Provide ample staff and avoid cutting hours (2)
- Enhance communication at all levels
- Remedy lamp light issue for energy efficiency
- Evaluate labor intensity when pulling weeds and realize hours involved to get the job done
- Replace aging structures



**6) Are there park or recreation design features that increase or decrease maintenance needs? If so, please describe.**

*Design Features That Increase Maintenance Needs*

- Closely placed trees increase maintenance needs by making it harder to mow; improve the placement of trees, signs, tables, sidewalks to allow for mowers (6)
- Portable picnic tables increase maintenance (2)
- Eliminate incredible amounts of turf located in right of ways and where it cannot be used (e.g., picnic areas)
- Eliminate useless irrigation in native plant areas
- Realize labor intensity and manpower hours involved in pulling weeds by hand

*Design Features That Decrease Maintenance Needs*

- Eliminate placing drinking fountains near sandy play areas
- Eliminate tree wells by planting groves
- Eliminate useless turf and plant forests instead (e.g., lawns near Defazio bridge)
- Decrease tree islands and cement medians
- Eliminate portable picnic tables
- Promote computer run irrigation (saves water and increases water efficiency)
- Avoid excessive slopes around sport turf areas and remedy old ball fields where slopes are causing erosion from infield to outfield
- Promote low maintenance designs
- Enforce the following of construction specs when contractors are constructing new parks; construction specs are not being followed which increases the amount of maintenance problems the staff encounters

**7a) Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement:**

**I am provided with the equipment and tools necessary to efficiently maintain park, open space and recreation facilities.**

- 1) Strongly Agree (4)
- 2) Agree (6)
- 3) Disagree (4)
- 4) Strongly disagree (1)
- 5) Don't know

**7b) If you checked either option 3 or 4 in question 7a, please tell us how maintenance equipment and tools could be improved.**

- Provide sufficient specialty equipment, e.g., aerator, "tool kit" in each vehicle (3)
- Provide sufficient vehicles for our crew; replace the 15+ year old vehicles
- Provide sufficient facilities to maintain our tools



**8) How can the City improve relationships with partner agencies, such as school districts and the County, to enhance the maintenance of parks, open space and recreation facilities?**

*Communication*

- Provide better communication, even at lower levels and clear up the “gray” areas of the partnership (5)
- Foster better collaboration for maintenance boundaries for a seamless standard look (2)
- Create a group of representatives from each agency to meet regularly to plan for improvements like efficient trail systems and athletic facilities

*School District Partnerships*

- Avoid and/or beware of partnerships with the school district. Evaluate what PROS would gain in a school partnership (2)

*Suggested Improvements to Existing System*

- Form a regional park district
- Enhance the existing garbage program
- Maintain current staffing levels

**9) In what ways could community volunteers assist with maintenance of parks, open space and recreation facilities?**

- Help “police” the parks all hours of the day and night (e.g., litter, problem citizens, graffiti, vandalism, writing tickets to citizens who don’t clean up after their dogs and creating presence in the parks)(8)
- Invasive plant removal (2)
- Provide supervised ‘clean-ups’
- Volunteers should assist with all areas of maintenance including: park clean up, planting flowers, irrigation, trail building, and transient issues
- Assist with projects or events
- Assist with the supervision of senior program
- Operate “Adopt a Park” programs
- Assist with fundraisers
- Assist with maintenance in the unassigned parks (e.g., Skinner Butte and W.J.)
- Eliminate volunteer use with dog parks (these parks should be completely run by the users)
- Volunteers should not assist with maintenance

**10) Of all the improvements discussed in this questionnaire, what three parks, recreation and open space improvements are most needed in Eugene today? (Please list your choices. They do not have to be in priority order.)**

- Preserve aging park infrastructure (e.g., restrooms, play areas)(7)
- Hire more staff (4)
- Build a major sports complex (3)
- Promote park safety with rule enforcement (transients, camping, vandalism and dogs off leash) (3)
- Hire park rangers to help all aspects of park monitoring, including vandalism and graffiti (3)
- Upgrade and improve older facilities (e.g., Alton Baker Park, Amazon Park and Skinner Butte) (2)
- Provide stable funding (2)
- Develop a new swing shift
- Improve signage in our parks, open space and trail systems (2)



### *Facility and Park Development*

- Improve drainage in parks
- Develop parks with multiple uses
- Provide better access to the river, beaches and boat ramps
- Develop and promote more rough natural-looking areas
- Improve sport fields maintenance
- Evaluate existing median designs
- Connect bike paths to main use areas (Amazon Park and South Eugene H.S.)
- Enhance Alton Baker Park regional playground
- Promote low maintenance design in all new developments
- Encourage maintenance staff input in the design process and planning of new developments
- Promote more natural preservation and connectedness of park systems
- Streamline, improve and enforce contractors work
- Complete the Alton Baker Park Master Plan
- Construct additional restrooms in recreational areas
- Install MAXI systems to increase water savings and proper irrigation of plants
- Develop a sports complex
- Provide and improve adequate inventory measurements with new software

### *Program Development*

- Advertise and promote park usage such as “Cuthbert Amphitheatre”
- Provide more family oriented park activities (e.g., gazebo or “Big Band” events)

### *Staff Improvements*

- Increase generalization of employee tasks in order to decrease burnout and improve ownership mentality

## **11) Additional Comments?**

- Provide at least two more dog parks (2)
- Provide an enforcement ‘ranger’ at all parks
- Update and /or replace existing wading pools
- Update and/or replace existing restrooms
- I’m always impressed by the good work we do and am very proud to work here. I hope the comments made during this initiative are really taken to heart

*Prepared by MIG, Inc., Eugene, Oregon*

